

contents of several filing cabinets. There must be more than a quarter of a million words to wade through, most of them, as he clearly wants us to accept, garbage. So it is a relief to be able to assert, with weary confidence, they they need not concern us here.

This is not simply because the vagaries of the American press are different from ours: a similar book here would, I suspect, provide a similar load of old British rubbish. The real give-away is MacDougall's list of chapter headings, in which ESP is in the company of Sea-serpents, the Loch Ness monster, Doomsday predictions, Curses and such. Reports of, say, Rhine's work at Duke and after are given the same treatment as reports from the Flat Earth Society and the Satanists. It is the measure of MacDougall's absence of any critical faculty in this field of his operations that he accepts as gospel the pronouncements of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal—even of Randi! As MacDougall's gripe is that the press treats stories about the paranormal without questioning their validity, this is an area where he might learn to apply the admonition to himself.

BRIAN INGLIS

*Garden Flat
23 Lambolle Road
London NW3*

APPEARANCES OF THE DEAD: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF GHOSTS by R. C. Finucane. Junction Books, London, 1982. vii + 232 pp. £13.50; £6.50 (paper).

The aim of Dr. Finucane's 'cultural history of ghosts' is to consider the following three problems: 'How the dead have been perceived in Western European traditions; what changes have occurred in these perceptions through the centuries; and why these perceptions have altered' (p. 1). The term 'perceived' is to be interpreted literally. These questions have to do with the varying experiences of those who, in different historical periods, have seen, heard, felt, etc., the apparitions of deceased persons. Dr. Finucane examines Western European accounts of apparitions from classical times to the present, though his post-Reformation examples are confined to English and a few French cases. He muddies the waters a little by introducing tales of poltergeists, vampires and fraudulent materializations; but I shall ignore these red (or reddish) herrings.

The comparative study of apparition-experiences has of course a possible bearing upon certain interesting theoretical issues. If apparitions are (as is commonly held) entirely subjective, if they exist only in the minds of those who perceive them, then we should expect their forms, behaviour and significance to differ very much from one culture or historical epoch to another. For instance if Ronald Rose is correct in suggesting (*Living Magic*, New York, 1956, pp. 144–156) that among Australian aborigines crisis apparitions sometimes take the form of totem animals; if messages delivered by *revenants* always conform to the superstitions of their audience, whatever those superstitions may be; if the apparitions of undeniably mythic figures may be collectively perceived; then on

balance subjective theories of apparitions are bound to be strengthened. On the other hand objective theories of apparitions—ones that hold that something at least partially independent of the percipient is at the spot where the apparition is seen—will probably be on balance less difficult (though never easy) to sustain to the extent that apparitions have features that are invariant across cultures (C. F. Emmons' *Chinese Ghosts and ESP*, Metuchen, N.J., 1982, is of particular interest in this connection).

Dr. Finucane does not delve into theories of apparitions, but the general tendency of his findings certainly favours the subjective theories. Most of the leading motifs are already present in classical ghost-stories, and stories from later ages present them again with variations of emphasis. Early mediaeval ghosts were, generally speaking, concerned (p. 46) 'with establishing and emphasizing Christian teachings over a broad spectrum, from the need to venerate relics to the very existence of immortal souls'. Later mediaeval apparitions reinforced Catholic teachings about punishment and reward after death, and clarified and nourished the belief in Purgatory. During the Reformation, when the doctrine of Purgatory was under strong attack from Protestants, Catholic apologists more than ever invoked stories of apparitions in its defence.

With the seventeenth century comes a marked change. 'Figures wreathed in flames, or crushed by heavy cloaks or dragging about in partially blackened bodies are old-fashioned, though they still surface from time to time' (p. 149). Most apparitions are quite 'normal' in appearance, voice and general behaviour, though there is a tendency for them to represent physical condition at the time of death. Their interests and purposes, when they have them, are not theological, but to do with revenge, legacies, judicial disclosure, treasure and personal chattels.

The eighteenth century 'age of reason' was not a good time for ghosts. Denied by freethinkers and ridiculed by enlightened Christians, they 'were victims of eighteenth-century rationality and wit. With the rise of scepticism there was among the educated classes a decline of interest in such manifestations except for their value as examples of the beliefs of common folk. In short, the apparition-world went into eclipse for many reasons . . .' (p. 169). I think that eighteenth century ghosts were a good deal more resilient than Dr. Finucane allows. To a large extent they continued in business as usual, undeterred by the scepticism of the enlightened. Indeed a surprising number of eighteenth century apparition stories found their way into such later collections as the two well-known volumes by J. H. Ingram, or the 'B' volumes of Katharine Briggs' *Dictionary of British Folk-Tales*.

In discussing Victorian ghosts (from which modern examples differ very little), Dr. Finucane draws heavily upon the archives of this Society. Most Victorian apparitions, he says (pp. 211–212)

'involved figures (or other indications) of humans whose identity was unknown to the percipients. The forms tended to be insubstantial, vague, often in neutral tones of grey and black, or associated with some random luminescence . . . When it comes to purpose, observers usually attributed no specific reason for the perceptions they reported. Most Victorian ghosts were perceived as having nothing to say about buried treasure, murders,

revenge, legacies, and *most* percipients evidently felt no need to provide a resolution to this puzzle. The apparition was there; that was enough . . . In a Christian society assailed by scepticism and science, but influenced too by romantic hopes and visions, Victorian apparitions satisfied the thirst for immortality.'

Now if Dr. Finucane's account of the way apparition-experiences have changed over the centuries is correct, it still further fortifies the subjective theories. I think that probably it is not correct, but there is no way of being certain. The trouble is that prior to the endeavours of More and Glanvill in the later seventeenth century we have very little first-hand, or even good second-hand, testimony as to what the percipients of apparitions actually experienced. Most of the stories that have come down to us were strung together by literary or clerical persons who clearly never bothered to check their sources or to ask whether the cases in question were fact or fiction. Indeed most of the edifying tales told by such writers as Gregory of Tours or Caesarius of Heisterbach are quite certainly fiction. The nearer we get to first-hand testimony, I think it is fair to say, the more nearly do the experiences reported approximate to those collected in, say, *Phantasms of the Living* or the Report on the Census of Hallucinations. Most of the seventeenth century apparitions reported in Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphatus* are (like modern examples) 'realistic', that is they look and behave rather like real persons (though sometimes persons at the point of death). Seventeenth century stories differ from modern ones in that the apparitions are more commonly of persons known to the percipient, and tend more often to have a purpose (revenge, justice, monition, paying a debt). But of course collections like Glanvill's were formed for a definite aim—to convert the ungodly to belief in a just God and a spiritual world—and cannot possibly be regarded as representative of the general run of contemporary ghost stories, any more than can later collections intended chiefly to frighten or to entertain. Not until after the foundation of the SPR do we get any attempts at an unbiased sampling of the apparition-experiences of the general population.

Dr. Finucane shows here and there that he is well aware of these difficulties, and he must be equally aware that, for earlier periods at least, they are insuperable. I am a little puzzled, therefore, as to why he undertook this investigation in the first place. It cannot have been in the serious hope of answering the questions which he began by posing. The questions that he can perhaps answer, and sometimes appears to be tackling, have to do not with the phenomenology of apparitions across the centuries, but with the social, intellectual and religious factors which have made certain categories of (purportedly factual) ghost story, and certain ways of approaching ghost stories, acceptable or unacceptable to fairly educated persons at different periods of our history. But I cannot help feeling that at heart Dr. Finucane is simply someone who enjoys ghost stories and the literature of ghosts. As one who shares his interest, I am grateful to him for this lively, humorous and scholarly collection of stories from different historical epochs. The collection is somewhat uneven, being strongest for the middle ages, and weakest for the eighteenth century. But no one could be expected to cover all parts of such an immense literature with equal thoroughness. And Dr. Finucane's book, which is, so far as I know, the first

entirely devoted to this subject, will be a valuable sign-post to any future student who wishes to explore the historical dimension of ghost stories and the interesting issues bound up with it.

ALAN GAULD

*Department of Psychology
University of Nottingham
Nottingham NG7 2 RD*

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor,

On p. 221 of the October issue Miss Haynes states that St. Francis of Assisi was known as the Seraphic Doctor. I was always under the impression that he was called the Seraphic Father and that it was St. Bonaventura who was called the Seraphic Doctor.

Further I think that it was a needle and not a pin on which angels were said to sit, dance or stand. As is well known, one of the earliest mentions of this quaint controversy is in the fourteenth century tractate *Swester Katrei* attributed, although falsely, to Meister Eckhart.

E. J. DINGWALL

*St Leonards-on-Sea
East Sussex*

To the Editor,

I would like to bring to the notice of your readers an irregularity in my report of the 'phantom leaf effect' at the S.P.R.-P.A. Centenary-Jubilee Conference at Cambridge in August 1982.* On a subsequent follow-up of the work we found that the phenomenon seemed to depend on one particular operator who was our research assistant. He disappeared without notice when the occasion arose to demonstrate the effect to foreign visiting scientists and we now suspect that he was producing a spurious effect. At all events, I have since failed to obtain the effect and would suggest, therefore, that our report at that conference will need to be reassessed. The effect we got might be explained by electrostatic forces which allow the leaf to oscillate in the air gap in our apparatus and the oscillating corona discharge would then fill up the gap of the cut portion which, to visual observation, would appear as a phantom effect. I now no longer believe that the phenomenon exists but I would still be interested to hear from anyone who thinks he has a proof of its existence.

PRAKESH KEJARIWAL

*Sitaram Bhartia Institute of Scientific Research
55 Gariahat Road, Calcutta -700 019, INDIA*

* See P. C. Kejariwal, A. Chattopadhyaya and J. K. Choudhury 'Some Observations on the Phantom Leaf Effect' *Research in Parapsychology 1982*, Metuchen, N.J. & London: Scarecrow Press 1983.